

SPECIFICATION

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FAN CONTROL CIRCUIT FOR X-RAY TUBE DEVICE

Background of Invention

Technical Field

[0001] The present application relates generally to imaging systems, and more particularly, to imaging systems that use a fan as part of the cooling system.

Background

[0002] Various types of imaging such as CT systems use a cooling system to cool the X-ray tube. The cooling system typically employs a liquid-to-air heat exchanger to remove heat from the X-ray tube during operation. The liquid cooler typically includes a fan that is used to remove heat to the ambient air. Heat exchangers are sized for the maximum steady state capable of the X-ray tube. Many X-ray systems operate at a much lower average power for which the heat exchanger is designed. The fans of such system run at a very high speed. This high speed is much higher than necessary to remove the heat generated by the X-ray tube. Such fans are noisy and have been found to be disturbing to both patients and radiologists.

[0003] It would therefore be desirable to reduce the amount of noise during operation of an X-ray system.

Summary of Invention

[0004] In one aspect of the invention the X-ray system comprises an X-ray tube temperature sensor generating a temperature signal and a fan coupled to the temperature sensor. The fan has a speed that varies in response to the temperature signal.

[0005] In a further aspect of the invention, a method for operating an X-ray system comprises measuring a temperature of an X-ray tube and controlling the fan speed in response to the temperature.

[0006] One advantage of the invention is that patient comfort is increased due to the fan operating at lower speeds when the temperatures are lower. Typically the temperatures increase slowly and thus the fan speed slowly increases which makes the corresponding increase in noise less noticeable.

[0007] Other aspects and advantages of the present invention will become apparent upon the following detailed description and appended claims, and upon reference to the accompanying drawings.

Brief Description of Drawings

[0008] Figure 1 is a block diagrammatic schematic view of an X-ray system having a fan control circuit according to the present invention.

[0009] Figure 2 is a plot of fan speed with sound levels versus temperature for the system according to the present invention.

Detailed Description

[0010] The present invention is described with respect to a CT type system. Those skilled in the art will recognize that the present invention is also applicable to various types of X-ray systems.

[0011] Referring now to Figure 1, an X-ray system 10 such as a CT system is illustrated. The CT system illustrated is simplified to highlight the aspects of the present invention. Those skilled in the art will recognize various other components are present in such systems. CT system 10 includes a controller 12. Controller 12 is preferably microprocessor-based. Controller 12 may be a single central controller or may be a controller specifically designed to control the operation of a cooling system 14 for an X-ray tube 16. X-ray tube 16 is thermally coupled to a heat exchanger 18. Heat exchanger 18 may be a liquid-to-air type heat exchanger typically used in X-ray systems. Heat exchanger 18 may have an integral fan or fans 20 coupled thereto. Those skilled in the art will recognize that fan 20 may also be a separate component

placed adjacent to heat exchanger 18. Fan 20 is designed to help move air over the heat exchanger to cool the heat exchanger 18 and ultimately X-ray tube 16. Controller 12 is operably coupled to fan 20 to control the speed thereof.

[0012] Heat exchanger 18 may also include a thermistor 22. Thermistor 22 may actually be an integral component with heat exchanger 18. Thermistor 22 generates a temperature signal corresponding to the amount of temperature present in the heat exchanger. Thermistor 22 is coupled to a voltage source 30. Thus, the voltage change across thermistor 22 from voltage source 30 changes in response to the temperature of the heat exchanger 18. A shunt resistor 32 may be positioned electrically in parallel with thermistor 22. Resistor 32 may be referred to as a shunt resistor. A shunt 34 may also be positioned in parallel with the thermistor 22 and resistor 32. Thus, each of the thermistor 22, resistor 32, and shunt 34 have two common nodes N_1 and N_2 . Shunt 34 is thermally controlled to close when a high temperature is sensed. That is, at temperatures above 100 ° C, shunt 34 may be closed. Otherwise, shunt 34 is normally open.

[0013] In series with the parallel combination of thermistor 22, resistor 32, and shunt 34, a gain resistor 36 may also be coupled to node N_2 . Shunt resistor provides a voltage divider so that controller has a proper range of controlling voltage thereto. Node N_2 is coupled to controller 12 to monitor the temperature signal from thermistor. Based upon the output of the temperature signal, controller 12 controls the speed of fan 20. The speed of the fan preferably varies over the temperature range except when the temperature reaches the shunt closing temperature. Also, to prevent the fan from not operating when the X-ray tube is cold, a pair of diodes 38 and 40 may be provided so that the controller constantly has some voltage and operates the fan at a minimal speed. As shown, the series connection of diodes 38 and 40 has the anode of diode 38 coupled to the gain resistor while the cathode of diode 38 is coupled to the anode of diode 40. The cathode of diode 40 is coupled to ground.

[0014] In addition, an over temperature switch 42 and an over pressure switch 44 may also be coupled to voltage source 30. Thus, if the temperature of X-ray tube 16 exceeds a certain pressure or temperature, the signal is received by controller 12. Controller 12 may also control the fan to the maximum fan speed upon the sensing of

high temperature or pressure within the X-ray tube 16.

[0015] In operation, thermistor 22 generates a temperature signal responsive to the temperature within the heat exchanger 18 which directly corresponds to the temperature in X-ray tube 16. The fan speed changes in response to the temperature signal until a maximum fan speed is reached.

[0016] Referring now to Figure 2, as the temperature within the heat exchanger increases the temperature signal also changes from the thermistor 22. Thus, Figure 2 illustrates the fan speed that changes in response to the temperature. When a predetermined temperature such as 100 ° is reached, the fan speed is elevated to maintain a maximum fan speed. As illustrated, the maximum fan speed is about 2900 rpm. As can be seen, the output of the controller and thus the operation of the fan is non-linear. Sound level measurements are also provided for various speeds. As speed increases sound level increases.

[0017] While the invention has been described in connection with one or more embodiments, it should be understood that the invention is not limited to those embodiments. On the contrary, the invention is intended to cover all alternatives, modifications, and equivalents, as may be included within the spirit and scope of the appended claims.